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The Influence of Monitoring Practices on Agricultural Projects: A Case of Selected Donor Funded Projects in Kisii County, Kenya

Osubo Mwambi

Student, Department of Development Studies, Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Dr. Karuri Thiongo

Lecturer, Department of Development Studies, Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Abstract:

The Performance of projects is considered a source of concern to both public and private sector. In Kenya Counties are useful engine and force of economic growth and recovery through provision of public goods and services. However, poor service delivery due to corruption, lack of accountability, nepotism and gross mismanagement in counties has increased the country's cost of production there by adversely affecting Kenya's external competitiveness and leading to loss of jobs and economic opportunities. Studies already done agree that monitoring practices is a determinant to project performance. Currently monitoring practices of projects in Kenya at counties are weak due to poor practices in place. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of monitoring practices on the performance of donor funded agricultural projects in Kisii County. The objectives of the study were to determine: the influence of auditing on the performance of agricultural projects; the influence of progress review on the performance of agricultural projects; the influence of scheduled follow ups on the performance of agricultural projects; and influence of management by exception on performance of agricultural projects in Kisii County. The study employed theory of change to draw theoretical constructs that enhanced description of monitoring practices. Mixed research methods were adopted in the study which combined quantitative and qualitative techniques. The study adopted descriptive survey design since it enhanced use of quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate one or more variables. The study targeted projects staff and beneficiaries (N=215) working of various agricultural projects in Kisii County since they were deemed to have relevant attributes, such as knowledge on monitoring practices applied to determine progress of ongoing projects. The target population for this study included: Project Donors/Sponsors, Project Managers, Monitoring and Evaluation Officers, Project Officers, Project Coordinators, Finance Officers, Project Communication Officers, Team Assistants, Sub County Agricultural Sector Managers, County Agricultural Sector Managers, Project Consultants and beneficiaries. A sample of 140 projects staff and beneficiaries working in various agricultural projects participated in the study. Data collection was done using questionnaires, whereas SPSS version 24 was used to run descriptive and inferential statistics. Analysis of collected data revealed that donor organizations regularly use audit practice to assess and track progress of projects. In addition, the study established that donor organizations undertake a participatory oriented auditing process, where majority of the donor organizations have the capacity to effectively cope with dynamic auditing. Furthermore, the study established that donor organizations use progress review tools to assess performance of projects, where routine progress assessment augments timely delivery of projects. In addition, donor organizations undertake data verification to enhance monitoring credibility and objectivity in addition to use of key performance indicators to review progress of projects. Results indicated that donor organizations have adequate capacity in form of skills to undertake scheduled follow-ups. Besides, the study established that donor organizations regularly involve stakeholders when undertaking scheduled project assessment, where scheduled follow-ups ensure realization of project sustainability related goals. Evidently, it was clear that donor organization use M&E when undertaking scheduled follow-ups. Notably, the study established that progress review reports have a statistically significant relationship with performance of agricultural projects ($p < .05$), while auditing, scheduled follow-ups and management by exception are not statistically significant ($p > .05$). These study results are expected to inform policy and form important entry points in enhancing monitoring practices in Kisii County.

Keywords: Project, performance, monitoring, influence, Kisii County

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

The monitoring function has grown in importance, mainly because it helps the organization to compensate for the loss of control as a result of increase in its complexity, but most important it helps management to detect and manage which is a crucial part of corporate governance process (Cai, W. J., Loon, M., & Wong, P. H. K. (2018). Kenya has quality

assurance and standards officers, whose roles being monitoring and advising on standards in education based on all round aspects. Performance indicators standards for various areas, including games, music, drama, science congress, scouts and girl guides, academic performance, environmental education, health care and nutrition, pupils welfare provision and optimum utilisation of available resources and endowments (Muchelule Yusuf, Mbawi Geoffrey, Muchelule Saada Achayo 2017).

The monitoring practices and functions in public owned entities play critical roles in the national development endeavors. First, public-owned entities are critical in promoting and enhancing economic growth and development (Kirusa, 2015; Mburu, & Muturi, 2016). Secondly they are critical in technical capacity and/or building capability of states in facilitating and/or promoting national development. Thirdly, they are necessary tools and equipment in improving the delivery of public goods and services, including meeting the basic needs of citizens. Fourthly, they have been widely applied to the creation of real and widespread employment opportunities in various jurisdictions, and lastly the state corporations are useful for targeted and judicious building of worldwide relationships and collaborations.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In Kenya counties are a major force of economic recovery and growth through provision of public goods and services. However, poor service delivery due to corruption, fraud, nepotism and gross mismanagement in counties has increased the country's cost of production there by adversely affecting Kenya's external competitiveness and leading to loss of economic opportunities and jobs. Studies done agree that practices of monitoring is a factor to projects performance. However, monitoring practices of projects at counties in Kenya are weak due to poor practices embraced. According to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2018), 60% and above of substantive projects fail to meet targeted goals due to ineffective monitoring practices. This leads to projects being completed over budget, not on schedule and period this affects quality and performance of projects.

Agriculture is the backbone of our economy since the sector provides employment opportunities for people and enables Kenya to earn foreign incomes through exports. In addition, monitoring of agricultural projects has been cited a key approach to boosting productivity of the sector since the development of indicators across the levels of agricultural programs provides information for timely decision-making and adjustment of programs. However, am of the view that ineffective monitoring systems in developing and third world countries have affected agricultural output. In Kisii County, the role and/or effectiveness of monitoring practices seem to face various snags, such as lack of enough integrated M&E in management information systems of the projects, no simplification of the log frame approach and underestimating the complexities of data gathering. Thus, the study sought to determine the extent to which the functions of monitoring have supported agricultural productivity in Kisii County.

A majority of counties do not have established monitoring practices due to misuse of resources, poor planning, conflict of interest and inadequate communication in meeting mandatory requirements; hence failing to deliver results that do not meet stakeholders needs despite monitoring practices being in place. There are limited studies done which have addressed specific link between monitoring practices on projects performance from a Kenya's perspective. This clearly demonstrates a special need to bridge the gaps in knowledge and practices in monitoring in the Kenyan context. It is with this in mind that the study sought to establish how monitoring practices influences and determines performance of donor funded agricultural projects in Kisii County, Kenya.

1.2. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of monitoring practices on the performance of donor funded agricultural projects in Kisii County.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Literature

This study adopted the theory of change since it is applicable to the practice of monitoring with a view to establish the underlying reasons for the existence of the present problem.

The study of monitoring has long been defined by the theory of change since the theory offers indispensable frameworks that help understand how interventions work in the most effective and efficient ways. It was mainstreamed by Carol Weiss in 1995 who underscored the necessity of understanding the pathways that programs and projects follow in order to realize the anticipated outcomes and results. The theory has been applied across the world to indicate how various procedures of an intervention are intertwined to produce the results. Many intervention designers have adopted the key tenets of the theory of change to show certain assumptions of a program must be met for the intervention to be effective. Towards this end, it appears that the theory of change is offers critical insights on what needs to be done for interventions to increase their goal orientation by managing for results.

The theory of change in the current study is relevant since it offers theoretical constructs that explain the 'what ifs' that are critical for the seamless performance of the intervention. In addition, the program theory is important since it provides a roadmap or blueprint that indicates what needs to be done for the intended outcomes and impacts to be achieved. Thus, for effective governance outcomes, various government interventions are designed in light of the existing program theories. This means that program theory offers a description on what needs to be done for the desired results to be realized, where this could be based on either or both on experience and research.

The theory of change is applicable to the current study since it provides theoretical constructs that explain the steps that an intervention follows in order to realize the set goals and results. Moreover, the theory of change is essential in evaluating interventions and how various engagements or activities are linked to contribute to the outcomes. In conducting monitoring, theory of change offers a benchmark upon which results can be monitored at every level. Over and above, theory of change increases the accountability tenet of a program by enhancing monitoring of various program components and how incremental results can be increased in order to enhance realization of the overall results.

3. Research Methodology

A research design is a scheme, outline or plan that is used to generate answers to research problem (Mugenda&Mugenda, 2003). The study adopted and used a descriptive survey design. This is according to (Creswell & Clark 2017), a survey is an organised activity to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population in relation to one or more variables. The survey design allowed the researcher to gather information on actual state of monitoring practices and project performance amongst donor funded agricultural projects in Kisii County. This design also allowed the researcher to gather information from many cases. The information on the effects of monitoring practices on project performance among donor funded agricultural projects in Kisii County was obtained by collecting data through questionnaires and through interview with the heads of agriculture departments. A sample was drawn from the 215 respondents who were deemed to have relevant information.

3.1. Sample Size

Category	Population	Proportion	Sample Size
Project donors/sponsors	8	3.7	5
Project managers	11	5.1	7
Monitoring and evaluation officers	19	8.8	12
Project officers	35	16.3	23
Project coordinators	12	5.6	8
Finance officers	5	2.3	3
Project communication officers	7	3.3	5
Team assistants	20	9.3	13
Sub county Agriculture sector managers	30	14.0	20
County Agriculture sector managers	4	1.9	3
Project consultants	14	6.5	9
Beneficiaries	50	23.3	33
Total	215	100.0	140

Table 1: Target Population and Sample Size

4. Research Findings, Analysis, and Interpretation

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of monitoring practices on the performance of donor funded agricultural projects in Kisii County.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.418	.854	5.176	.000
	Auditing	.148	.136	.097	.280
	Progress Review	.226	.096	.207	.020
	Scheduled follow-ups	.020	.113	.002	.983
	Management-by-Exception	.129	.095	.123	.178

a. Dependent Variable: Project Performance

Table 2: Research Analysis

From the regression findings, the substitution of the equation ($Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \beta$) becomes:
 $Y = 4.418 + 0.148X_1 + 0.226X_2 + 0.02X_3 + 0.129X_4$

Where Y is the dependent variable (Project Performance), X_1 is Auditing, X_2 is Progress Review, X_3 Scheduled follow-ups, X_4 is Management-by-Exception. According to the equation, taking all factors; (Management-by-Exception, Auditing, Progress Review, Scheduled follow-ups) constant at zero, Project Performance will be 4.418. The data findings also showed that a unit increase in Auditing variable could lead to a 14.8% increase in Project Performance. Unit increase in progress Review could lead to a 22.6% increase in Project Performance, while a unit increase in scheduled follow-ups could lead to a 2.0% increase in Project Performance. Unit increase in management by exception would lead to 12.9% increase in service delivery. This signifies that the order of significance on effects of monitoring practices was progress reviews, auditing, management by exception, and scheduled follow-ups respectively.

From the monitoring practices studied contributed to 5.8% of performance of donor funded projects in Kisii County. Therefore, taking 5.8% as a presentation of performance of agricultural projects due to monitoring practices shows that the four monitoring practices contribute 52.3 %. This means that the four monitoring practices contribute 52% of 5.8 % of performance associated with monitoring practices in Kisii County. Other monitoring practices not studied contribute to 48% to performance of donor funded agricultural projects in Kisii County. Overall, the results indicate that 5.8% of performance of agricultural projects is as a result of monitoring practices.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

- The study concludes that auditing practice is a critical monitoring approach that enables project teams to meet the dynamic demands of routine collection of data to establish progress or the lack of thereof.
- The study concludes that progress review as a monitoring practice statistically influences performance of agricultural projects, thus underlining the need for regular and timely use of progress review tool to ascertain level of project performance.
- The study concludes that scheduled follow-ups are central to establishing the actual performance levels for interventions, suggesting that various stakeholders should be involved in establishing actual performance against the established baseline.
- The study concludes that management by exception is central to enabling development-oriented organizations to identify and handle challenges faced in an endeavor to bring development to the targeted beneficiaries.

5.2. Recommendations

The study was limited to Kisiicounty, signifying the need to conduct studies across the country with a view of establishing the influence of monitoring practices on performance of projects. The study was limited to four variables, which explained 5.8% of variance in performance of agricultural projects. The study recommends further study on other monitoring practices or factors/variables not captured in the current study. Furthermore, the study covered agricultural projects in counties, which necessitates the need to undertake a study on other non-agricultural projects, such as health and education that are funded by donors to establish whether the results will be congruent or incongruent.

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